MARRIAGE PROHIBITIONS AND INCEST

582 rules forbidding marriage within certain groups and between certain categories of persons are not coterminous with those forbidding sexual congress, the two cannot be divorced. The reason given by Nuer for their marriage prohibitions is that were marriage to take place within certain degrees of relationship it would be *rual*, incest.

835 The word *rual* means both incest and the misfortune which it
684 causes. Syphilis and certain forms of yaws are believed to be espe-
●753 cially a consequence of incest, though retribution may come in any form, from wild beasts, a spear, drowning, sickness, &c. These misfortunes can sometimes be avoided by sacrifice. On the other hand, they may fall not only on the partners to the sin but also on their closest relatives, so that a man who commits incest may render himself responsible for homicide as well.

582 When it is forbidden for a man to have relations with a woman he may not, of course, marry her, and it will be simpler to begin this account by stating the Nuer table of marriage prohibitions. Marriage is not permitted between clansfolk, close cognates, close natural kinsfolk, close kinsfolk by adoption, close affines, and persons who stand to one another as fathers and daughters in the age-set system.

A man may not marry a clanswoman and *a fortiori* a woman of his lineage. Agnatic kinship is recognized between some clans, but it does not constitute a bar to intermarriage. The relationship is considered to be very distant and, in any case, the ancestor of the fraternal clans is believed to have cut an ox in twain to permit intermarriage between the descendants of his sons. Nuer accept the hypothesis that maximal lineages of the larger clans might one day split apart and marriage be allowed between them, but 'at present they are too close'. They say *'cike diel'*, 'they have not yet reached ten generations (from their founder)'. They perceive that the limits of clan exogamy have been fixed arbitrarily and are not unalterable.

582 Clan exogamy is stated by Nuer in terms of clan symbols. Each
614 clan has one or more spear-names, with which go certain honorific titles, and the spear-names of the bride's clan and the bridegroom's clan are formally shouted out at weddings. They must not be exactly the same, for this would mean that the marriage was a breach of the rule of clan exogamy. When a marriage is proposed between a youth and maid whose families are strangers the first

2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1951
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his maternal uncle—generally it would be the mother's uterine brother—for a bull-calf with the markings of the new ox-name he has taken. Though he cannot demand it as a right, he may curse his uncle's herd so that the male calves die if he is refused his request. It seems that the customary way of making this request is for the nephew to make an incision on the ear of the calf he desires. A man may not bury his maternal uncle, and I believe that a mother's brother should not bury his sister's son. Were a man to bury his maternal uncle he would die of *keth nara*, a disease which is said to cause white patches on the skin. The same disease may attack a man who hears that his maternal uncle has been wounded or cut himself severely and does not visit him and place some of the blood on his foot. Should the nephew not hear of the uncle's wound and contract the disease, he visits him and gets him to rub soot from the bottom of a pot on the affected surfaces. A man and his maternal uncle may not tether their cattle together in the same kraal, though the cattle may graze together. If one of the uncle's beasts dies the nephew may not skin it, for were he to do so he would destroy the uncle's herd and people would say that 'he had spilt the cattle of his uncle to the ground'. An uncle may not give his sister's son a spear-shaft, for the gift might cause him serious injury. A man and his sister's son must not use the same sleeping-hide or sleep in the same hut. These rules, especially those which forbid a man tethering his cattle in his uncle's kraal, skinning his uncle's beasts, and sleeping in the same hut as his uncle, seem almost designed to keep the two apart, to prevent a youth identifying himself with his maternal kin instead of with his paternal kin.

The maternal uncle is the kinsman who most often blesses a lad in the Nuer way of blessing, by spitting on the head. Grandparents may sometimes do this, but other relatives rarely. If a man comes frequently to visit his sister and partakes of her hospitality and does not occasionally spit on her child's head, the child may get the disease I have mentioned above. It is also said that when a maternal uncle rises during the day from a nap in the ashes of the hearth and his sister's son rubs the ashes off his back he must then spit on the lad's head. But if the blessing of a maternal uncle is desired, his curse is believed to be among the worst, if not the worst, a Nuer can receive, for, unlike the father, a maternal uncle may curse a youth's cattle, as well as his crops

7: Evans-Pritchard E-S (1931-1936) 1949 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

NUER RULES OF EXOGAMY AND INCEST[1]

835 753 864 THE Nuer word *ruai* means both incest and the misfortune which it causes. Syphilis and certain forms of yaws are believed to be especially a consequence of incest, though retribution may come in any form, from wild beasts, a spear, drowning, sickness, &c. These misfortunes can sometimes be avoided by sacrifice. On the other hand, they may fall not only on the partners to the sin (*diwer*) but also on their closest relatives, so that a man who commits incest may render himself responsible for homicide as well.

RULES OF EXOGAMY

582 When it is forbidden to a man to have relations with a woman he may not, of course, marry her, and it will be simpler to begin this account by stating the rules of exogamy. Marriage is not permitted between clansfolk, close cognates, close natural kinsfolk, close kinsfolk by adoption, close affines, and persons who stand to one another as fathers and daughters in the age-set system.

A man may not marry a clanswoman and *a fortiori* a woman of his lineage. Agnatic kinship is recognized between some clans but it does not constitute a bar to intermarriage. The relationship is considered to be very distant and, in any case, the ancestor of the fraternal clans is believed to have cut an ox in twain to permit intermarriage between the descendants of his sons. Nuer accept the hypothesis that maximal lineages of the larger clans might one day split apart and marriage be allowed between them, but 'at present they are too close'. They say *Cike diel*, 'They have not yet reached ten generations (from their founder)'. They perceive that the limits of clan exogamy have been arbitrarily fixed and are not unalterable.

A man may not marry any close cognate. Nuer consider that if relationship can be traced between a man and a woman through either father or mother, however many female links there may be, up to six generations (*kath*), though the number of generations is not absolutely fixed, marriage should not take

[1] A preliminary account of this subject was given in a lecture delivered to the Royal Anthropological Institute on 20 November 1934 (summary in *Man*, xxxv (1935), 7).

[p. 85]

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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query and is an abstract idea which they cannot explain in terms of specific examples; but this does not cause confusion to them because, although all aspects of their religion are an indirect extension of the idea of *kwoth*, there is a special terminology which refers to every kind of manifestation and category.

For example, there are, as will be seen later, *kolangni*, special spiritual forms which come into the possession of and possess individuals or kinship groups, and of these there are many different types of manifestation. They are often the cause of physical illness or misfortune. A particular individual may be subject to epileptic fits or periods of mental instability, and speaking in general terms the Nuer will say *tske kwoth*, 'he *has* or is possessed by *kwoth*'; but they will usually go further and qualify this statement by saying that he is possessed by some particular manifestation of *kwoth* which has a definite name. In some cases the individual will have called upon himself evil effects (though the same spirit may equally bring beneficial effects) in angering the spirit by some action, or more probably by failure to carry out some ritual obligation. There are special functionaries whose duty, in return for fees paid, usually in cattle, is first to diagnose the cause of the trouble and then to suggest a remedy, often assisting in the ritual which follows.

Kwoth is sometimes spoken of in the rôle of creator, but creation is more often explained in mythology by reference to ancestors. Such ancestors are not consciously thought of as manifestations of *kwoth*, although their origin would be explained as *kwoth*.[1] Ancestors are intermediaries between man and God; prayer is offered through them to *kwoth*. There is therefore a close relation between the concept of *kwoth* and religious practices associated with a patrilineal descent group. The word *thak* is used to express the idea of respect to ancestral spirits, and also, by extension, respect for kinship relations. Misfortunes and illness, sometimes referred to as *nuer*, are often believed to be caused by ancestral spirits who are angered on account of a breach of observance—such as neglect of prayers, which should be addressed to them—or by actual relations between living descendants. An offensive action against a kinsman demands not only some compensation in the form of apology or even material indemnification but also prayer and expiation. There is therefore a religious sanction for kinship obligations and observances.[2]

[1] E.g. when asking Nuer to relate their genealogies, one often finds that they get stuck at a particular ancestor—and there is, of course, always an ancestor beyond whom they cannot go. Pressed for an answer they will simply say that this man came from *kwoth*.

[2] *Thak*. A full explanation of the word *thak* is given in an article by Professor Evans-Pritchard in *Man*, Vol. XLIX, 96, 1949. He says: 'We can therefore perhaps best think of *thak* as a term indicating a category of ritual prohibition or taboo, as of *nuer* as a term commonly used both for the infringement and the sanction of this class of taboo.' My own view is that *thak* implies not only negative action in the form of prohibition or avoidance but also positive action in carrying out some observance or duty.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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occupies a place in the enclosure. Cane-stalks are generally used for fuel, although the women may go to the forest and bring wood. 354

The skin of a reed-buck is not usually seen in the Nuer home. A Nuer woman whose first child is a girl will not sit on the skin of the reed-buck as she believes sores will break out on her body if she does so. So the skin of the reed-buck is not as popular as it might be if there were no superstition attached to it. I gave a woman guest the skin of a reed-buck to sit on one day—thinking that I was honouring her, for it certainly was pretty—and was amazed at the way she suddenly sprang to her feet and got off the skin, explaining her actions by saying that her first child was a girl. 753

A visitor—if a stranger in Nuerland—is appalled by the paucity of the possessions in a Nuer family. What they have seems, even at its best, such a meagre portion of the things we think necessary for this life. Yet the wants of the Nuer are few. He wants food, a place to sleep in, cattle, at least one wife and as many more as he can possibly afford, and children. He wants also a good spear and club. These desires of his heart he wants to have supplied with the least possible effort on his own part. 181

THE WOMAN'S DAY

The day begins early for the mother. Soon after day-break she must take her large earthen jar and go to the river for water. She has a head-pad made of cane-leaves, with a hole in the middle of it—indeed, it resembles a huge doughnut. She puts this head-pad on her head and then puts the large earthen jar on top of it. She carries herself erect, occasionally putting one hand up to steady the jar. But usually she lets one hand hang down while in the other she carries her long-stemmed pipe, smoking as she goes. 512 782 [276]

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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164 757 Pneumonia is hard to cope with in this land, and is much dreaded. As soon as the Nuer thinks that he has pneumonia he refuses to take medicine, asserting that if a victim of pneumonia takes medicine, the remedy will drive the disease all over the body instead of just letting it stay in the lungs. So the patient sits in the sunshine and the usual precautions are taken to guard him from those who might cast the evil eye upon him. Hot milk is given him to drink, if milk is obtainable. But he spends his nights shut up in a windowless house, the door being shut also, and possibly a small fire within for warmth. Many die, but some cases, even those who have had haemorrhages, have lived.

752 Sometimes when empyema follows pneumonia another Nuer will operate on the patient, opening up the pleural cavity in order to let the pus out. He may even cut the rib. The Nuer give you the name of the tree from which a twig may be cut in order to splice the rib. But I know of no one who has survived this operation. The patient is forcibly held down while this operation is in progress as they have no anaesthetics.

164 753 Various other diseases of more or less importance may be found. Cases of what they fear is a severe stomach disorder may eventually be found to be simply due to their fear of a curse.

164 The Nuer dread smallpox; when there is any danger of an epidemic of it they are quite anxious to be vaccinated. Smallpox is usually virulent in this country, and their dread of it is justified by the fact that it takes a heavy toll of life.

Chicken-pox, measles, and mumps may also be found. I have not known of any scarlet fever or diphtheria. Tuberculosis of the lungs is rare, although tubercular bone cases may be found.

Syphilis is not common, and when found its origin

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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may generally be traced to a source outside the Nuer. 164
The Nuer have a superstition that dreadful things may happen—the nose may rot away, the head may split down the back—if they contract syphilis. Probably this superstition more than anything else tends to keep them from contracting the disease.

Gonorrhea, like syphilis, is not very common. It, too, may not infrequently be traced to a source which has no connection with the Nuer.

Children and the aged often suffer from malnutrition 146
owing to their limited diet.

A Nuer child has the six central lower teeth removed 753 ●
when he is about six or eight years old. They frequently 752
think that some illness the child has had is due to the teeth, 304
and so have them extracted. Even though there be no illness the teeth are removed while the child is little. There is no such thing in Nuerland as painless extraction of teeth, judging from the cries we have heard and sore mouths we have seen.

Broken bones are also not infrequent, tiny splints for 752
them are made out of cane stalk or some small twigs of a pliable wood. These are placed side by side and laced together, the splint thus formed being tied around the limb at the site of the broken bone.

Spear wounds are occasionally to be seen, but if they are the result of a fight, they are seldom brought to the clinic for medical treatment. The wound is cared for by the relatives of the injured person in the village so that the evil eye may not see the wound and retard its healing.

The art of the medicine man is often sought in order to 755
cure any disease that baffles ordinary treatment. He (or she, as the case may be, for women are also adepts at this art) may remove (?) various things from the throat and stomach, and thereby relieve (?) the cause of distress.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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in a way this is true. The Nuer find it hard to believe that God is a God of love. Even when they learn to love Him they still find it hard to trust Him when things go wrong. But the missionaries do not get too discouraged, for, after all, is not that habit world-wide?

A large portion of the Nuer tribe has never heard the Christian message. Of those who have heard it, few have yet made full response. Yet the influence of those who honour the name of Christ will make its mark upon the Nuer and lead to the forsaking of unworthy customs inherited from the past.

Although the Arab traders throughout Nuerland are Moslem, their religion has not appealed to the Nuer; the Moslem faith has so far gained no ground in Nuerland.

SUPERSTITIONS

The Nuer mind is full of superstitions, some of them being age-old. They believe them implicitly; "Would our parents lie to us?" they ask when any doubt is expressed. Many of the superstitions have to do with cattle (see Chapter II) and marriage (see Chapter V.)

A woman must never drink milk during her menstrual period. Nor at this time may she eat food which has been cooked in a kettle in which milk has been boiled. Why? Because to do so would harm the cattle.

If a woman is impregnated while still nursing a child, they cut a small piece off the ear of a dog and this is worn around the child's neck in order to keep it from harm. Any one walking in the footsteps of the father of this child may be the victim of dreadful things—his head may split right down the back.

If a child should have an attack of vomiting just after some strangers have been to the village, the strangers are at once suspected of having in part caused the attack.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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●753 Sometimes if the mission clinic is near they hurry there at once for relief. At other times the usual form of relief is sought—a sacrifice must be offered so that the child may not be further harmed by the errant stranger.

751 843 An anklet or wristlet made of large wooden beads of a certain kind of wood will protect from cuts from grass, but a man whose wife is pregnant may wear either anklet or wristlet made of red and white or black and white beads in order to accomplish the same purpose.

789 The Nuer fears a curse. Indeed, many a mysterious, inexplicable wasting away has been caused by this deep-rooted fear.

A bunch of a certain kind of grass standing up in the yard near the door will keep harm away from any sick person within.

754 The evil eye is much feared. There seems to be no definite idea as to who has this evil eye. Every one but one's own relatives must be suspected of it until one is sure that they do not possess it. The evil eye is supposed to harm whatever it sees, if it be a sick person, a sore, or even a new-born baby.

The disease becomes worse, the sore refuses to heal. All such misfortunes are attributed to the influence of the evil eye.

Patients who have ulcers to be dressed at the clinic are anxious that there be no onlookers when the sores are uncovered.

When a scar is healed but the scar tissue remains red, they plead piteously for a bandage so that they may keep it protected from the evil eye.

NUER LAW AND THE MORAL CODE

000 It is needless to say that Nuer law and their moral code are entirely different from that of our western world.

15: Butt E-4 (No date) 1952 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

respected; it is the spiritual being, the *kwoth*, which the totem stands for, which is revered. The totems are symbols or manifestations of a spirit which can be in communion with men and beasts.(1)

Totem spirits are called *kuth piny* (earth spirits) a category which includes fetishes; this is in contrast to the much more important *kuth nhial*, sky spirits. Yet, although the two categories are thus distinguished, the Nuer maintain that they worship totemic spirits and that these spirits are with god in the sky. The totem seems to be the symbol of the spirit and the spirit to be an aspect of the spirit of the sky which is connected with the various lineages and is symbolised differently in each.

Kwoth

In addition to totemic spirits, *kwoth* also refers to 'god in the sky' and can mean any one of the sons of the sky god - the *kwoth dwonge*. Each sky spirit is associated with a certain aspect of nature; for example, Deng refers to the rain spirit. Another group of spirits are the *col wic* - the spirits of persons who have been killed by lightning and taken up to heaven. Persons supposed to have been taken into heaven by a whirlwind and those found dead in the bush without any apparent cause are also *col wic*. A *col wic* is considered to be a sacred spirit of his lineage - a *kwoth goal* - and most lineages have at least one of these spirits to whom cows are dedicated. Sometimes a *col wic* spirit enters into a member of his family or lineage and, when this happens, the man whom he possesses falls sick; on recovery, he makes a shrine in his homestead and becomes a prophet of Col *(gak coal)*, and the spirit of lightning contacts the people through him.(2)

SACRIFICES

Sacrifices play an important part in all ritual practices, and are usually all of a similar nature. An animal is selected and is dedicated to a spirit by rubbing ashes along its back. An invocation is then made and the animal is killed by spearing it through the heart. It is cut in two halves when there is a cutting of social ties, and also at mortuary ceremonies when there is one half for the living and another for the dead. Sickness is the most frequent occasion for sacrifices.

THE CONCEPTS OF THEK AND NUER

Thek means 'to respect', and is used in various social contexts; for example, it denotes the behaviour expected of a man towards his parents-in-law; in blood feuds the kin of the slayer and of the slain may not eat from the utensils which the other party has used, and these are respected. In mortuary ceremonies a man's age-mates thek the meat which has been sacrificed in his honour. A man also pays respect to his totem. Failure to show respect where there is a thek relationship is thought to bring about misfortune.(3) Any serious sickness following the breach of a thek taboo is called *nuer*.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *Annali Lateranensi*, 1949, Vol.XIII, p.247.
(2) Evans-Pritchard, *Man*, 1949, No.2, p.9.
(3) *Ibid.*, 1949, No.96, p.75.

Cien

753 775 *Cien* is the vengeance wrought by a ghost which produces sickness and misfortune; like the other Nilotic tribal groups, the Nuer hold the concept of *cien*, and believe that ghostly vengeance will fall on those who have wronged a man and allowed him to die with a grudge. Fear of *cien* tends to make a Nuer more careful to treat others with justice.

[712] To stop the effects of *cien* it is necessary to make a sacrifice to god in the sky and, when possible, to make reparation.

NUER CURSES AND GHOSTLY VENGEANCE

789 Curses are uttered by someone who has been wronged. The efficacy of a curse is largely conditioned by the relationship of the curser to the cursed. The Nuer regard the curse of a mother or father as serious; it may result in death. The curse of a mother's brother is feared because, being of a different lineage, he may curse cattle, which is the worst of all curses in the eyes of the Nuer. The curse of an eldest child is feared by the mother and maternal uncle.

There are other curses imposed by those of the *ric* (age-set), the leopard-skin chief, the man of the cattle and *gok*, the prophet.(1) The Nuer also believe in conditional curses which may be laid on a man that become operative if he, or any of his descendants, should do a certain thing.

RITUAL PERSONS

791 There are several ritual figures among the Nuer who are important in the village community.

1. *The Leopard-Skin Chiefs.* They have a special relationship with the earth and can affect the welfare of the crops. They also have a limited role in rain-making and in the general regulation of the weather. They conduct the rituals concerned with homicide, with cleansing the parties to incestuous relations, with preventing feuds, and protecting warriors on raiding expeditions.

2. *The Bull Club.* Members of certain lineages have hereditary ritual powers in relation to cattle; they are asked to cure cows of various diseases and to ensure the fertility of barren animals. Their role is, however, a more restricted one than that of the leopard-skin chief, who has functions relating to social as well as to natural processes. Usually the *bull club* is a member of a stranger lineage, as is the leopard-skin chief, and this is presumably an advantage when they have to mediate between powerful and antagonistic lineages.

3. *Totemic Experts.* There are a number of totemic experts whose ritual connections with lions, crocodiles, and other dangerous creatures, enable them to influence the beasts' behaviour to the advantage of the community. A totemic specialist is the possessor of the spirit of his totem; he has no political significance.

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *Africa*, 1940, XIII, p.389.

15: Butt E-4 (No date) 1952 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

owner killed a man of another district, he began a feud and was liable to be killed by the kin of his victim. It seems that fetish owners were treated differently in different areas. Many people possess medicines which protect them from fetishes. 754

Death may be due to one of three causes: *olic kuoth* (a sickness of god), sorcery and the evil eye, or sickness due to fetishes. This last is sudden and may kill a man quickly, whereas a sickness sent by god is usually prolonged.(1) A man believing himself to be ill on account of a fetish summons a fetish owner to discover whose fetish is responsible. When this is known a sacrifice is made to the fetish and its owner is asked to stop it troubling the sick man. 754 763

When a fetish owner dies, his medicines are preserved until his spirit enter into one of his descendants who will then become a fetish owner in his stead. A man may purchase a fetish from another; the medicine is only the habitation of the fetish spirits who exist apart from it. The Nuer believe that a fetish kills someone because its owner dislikes him. 754

The Nuer Ghoul

Many of the Nilotic tribes believe in ghouls who feed on the bodies of those recently dead. This belief is found among the Acholi, Anuak, Shilluk, Lango, Dinka and Nuer. The Nuer ghoul is called the *ruath* and is regarded with horror by the people. The practice of ghoulist activities is to some extent hereditary, for the potentiality is found in certain lineages, but a man may become a *ruath* even if he is not a member of such a lineage. Disinterment of the dead is regarded as his most horrible activity.

A *ruath* may be killed by common consent and, although no blood must be spilt, he may be beaten to death with sticks without fear of revenge. This is the only instance among the Nuer of killing which does not demand compensation or vengeance.

LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

In childbirth a woman is attended by a female relative who is herself already a mother. The child's incisor teeth are removed at the age of eight years. 894 854 804

The birth of twins constitutes a danger to their family; special decorations are worn by the kinsmen, animals are sacrificed, and ritual prohibitions observed. As do other Nilotic groups, the Nuer believe that the parents are safe if the twins are of opposite sexes, for the boy will want to preserve his father and the girl her mother. In spite of the dangers, however, the Nuer are joyful at the birth of twins if they both live. Throughout life, twins are subject to certain ritual observances; before a twin can get married they must both together go through a fictional 941 582

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *E.N.R.*, 1935, p.74.

one was most embarrassed and I was later taken aside by a Nuer friend and told that I must never make such comments. On another occasion I got into trouble for asking a man in jest, and, I admit, in bad taste, whether it was food or beer inside him, for his belly was as tight as a drum. I was told that my question might well make the man sick, and one of those present said that once a man had remarked to him, 'Well, you are full', and shortly afterwards he was violently sick. The worst offence is to praise a baby. In referring to it one should use some such expression as '*giakeme*', 'this bad thing'. When blessing children by spitting on them, which is the Nuer manner of showing favour to a child, kinsmen, and more especially kinswomen, utter some opprobrious remarks, sometimes a string of obscenities, over them.

The idea here is not that of the evil eye (*peth*), though the two ideas may in some ways resemble one another and also overlap.[1] In Nuer opinion the evil eye is an act of covetousness or envy, whereas here, I think, the emphasis is on the danger of rejoicing in unusual good fortune lest it should be taken away. There is a feeling that God evens things out, so that if he helps the needy he may take away from those with superfluity. As I understood their view it expresses a certain uneasiness at attention being drawn to possessions lest pride should bring about retribution. That this is their view is further suggested by a number of their stories which relate how God punished presumptuousness. I mention only one in this place, a short myth which reminds us of the story of Elijah and the priests of Baal and which is obviously either taken from some foreign people or is a fairly recent creation of Nuer imaginative thought, because it is about the *Turuk*, Turks, and their rifles. The word *Turuk* means in Nuer, as it does in the languages of many of the black peoples of the Southern Sudan, all lighter-skinned northerners with whom they have had dealings during the last hundred years, that is, Turks, Egyptians, Arabs, and Nubians of the Northern Sudan, and ourselves and other Europeans. The 'Turks' compared their rifles to God's thunder, and there was a trial of strength between them and God. God made a huge mud image of an elephant and told the 'Turks' to shoot at it, which they did to no effect. God then brought clouds and darkness and thunder and lightning and smashed the image

[1] *Yup* is presumably the same word as the Shilluk *yoop* which Wilhelm Hofmayr (*Die Schilluk*, 1925, p. 221) translates by 'böse Blick'.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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when speaking of them and I have used small instead of capital first letters in writing their names. This enables me also to maintain more clearly the distinction between God and other spirits, though strictly speaking, and following the gender of *pneuma*, the neuter is not inappropriate for any conception of Spirit.

II

With the exception of *buk* and *col*, who are of some general interest to all Nuer, the spirits of the air are not conceptions of the same importance for everybody, and in this respect, as in others, they are unlike the conception of God. They have a more general significance than the totemic spirits, which are important only to certain lineages, whereas the spirits of the air are not tied to particular social groups. Nevertheless, a certain spirit of the air is significant for certain persons and families and not for others, because unless it has at some time or other possessed a man or one of his family or forebears he does not feel that he is personally concerned with it.

Possession is generally known by sickness, though in the case of prophets it may also be known by abnormal behaviour. Sickness, usually, I think, of a severe and sudden kind, may be diagnosed as being due to a particular spirit and the sufferer may in future, after he has recovered, regard it as one of his personal *kuth*; and then his descendants may continue to revere it. These two ways of acquiring a spirit, by being possessed and made sick and by inheritance, are interconnected, because an inherited spirit often shows that it regards itself as still attached to the family of a man after he has died by causing one of his children to fall sick, and it is likely to be neglected and forgotten if it does not occasionally remind the family of their obligations by troubling them. So when Nuer fall sick they may, if they cannot establish the cause, with the aid of a prophet or diviner examine their heredity to discover whether one or other grandparent, very likely a Dinka, may not have had a spirit whom they have forgotten or not thought important and who is bringing their negligence to their notice by the sickness.

Spirits may thus pass in and out of families, be forgotten and then remembered again, and perhaps in many instances forgotten altogether in course of time; or in other instances they may become

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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spirits of small lineages and their families, especially of lineages of Dinka descent. The fact that they are not found as spirits of larger lineages is perhaps further evidence of the late introduction of these spirits into Nuerland.[1] I speak here of ordinary Nuer, many, perhaps most, of whom do not in any case, particularly to the east of the Nile, have any special relationship to one or other of the spirits of the air, though they may have relationships to spirits of other kinds. In the case of prophets, their spirits are most unlikely to be forgotten and pass out of their lines of descent altogether.

Seizure of a man by a spirit may be temporary or permanent. When it is permanent the possessed person becomes a prophet. It will be simpler if I describe temporary possession first. Spirits cause sickness to their devotees and sometimes to others, and illness is often, especially in western Nuerland, attributed to them. If it is thought to be due to a spirit but there is uncertainty which particular spirit is responsible, the relatives consult a prophet or diviner to determine the responsibility, so that sacrifice may be made to the right spirit. They give it *duor*, a thing, as Nuer say—that is, they sacrifice to it to appease it. The sick man's recovery means that the spirit has released him. If he has not already done so, he then dedicates an animal to the spirit to show it that he is aware of their special relationship, and from time to time he makes sacrifice to it to let it know that he has not forgotten it. Otherwise it may cause trouble again.

I will describe what happened at a ceremony held when a youth called Galuak, of the Leek tribe, was sick on account of his having been seized by the spirit *nai*. This spirit, whom I have only heard mentioned in western Nuerland, has, as I have earlier remarked, a special association with ostriches, to which it is said to be very partial. When an ostrich is killed those who have a special relationship to the spirit tie some of its plumes to the entrances to their byres. When I asked whether *nai* would not be angry at the killing of one of its birds I was told that it cares nothing for the body of the bird, only for its plumes. Prophets of *nai* decorate the shafts of their spears with ostrich plumes. *Nai* seems to be regarded as one of the most inferior of the spirits of the air.

[1] Further evidence is the fact that while people are now often named after the spirits, especially after dreng, these spirit-names do not occur at the upper levels of Nuer genealogies.

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It was this spirit, a particularly dangerous one, that was troubling Galuak. Nuer use the word *kep*, to take hold of or to lay hold on, to describe the possession of a man by a spirit. It was known that it was *nai* who was responsible because when the year before Galuak had a similar sickness a prophet of *nai* had divined that he was possessed by this spirit. On that occasion his family had sacrificed goats, but during the past year no sacrifice had been made or ceremony held in the spirit's honour, an omission of which Galuak's family now felt very conscious. In the circumstances a return of the spirit to Galuak might have been expected.

The same prophet had been sent for from a neighbouring village and was expected to arrive before evening. In the meanwhile Galuak's kinsmen sought high and low for a beast to sacrifice right away to *nai*. All animals in the village suitable for sacrifice had recently been killed in other ceremonies (p. 59) and the kinsmen were unable to bring back even a goat for their pains. I was told that *nai* would not, however, kill Galuak in the meantime because it would see that they were trying to find an animal. The prophet arrived, as was expected, in the evening and he was accompanied by two friends. No doubt the matter was discussed in the byre that night, but no action was taken till the following morning.

In the morning, after a talk in the byre, the persons concerned went across to the hut of Galuak's mother, Nyadang, and I was invited to accompany them as a friend of the family. Nhial, Galuak's brother, was working for me. Here the prophet was presented with five piastres—on his visit the year before he had been given a war-spear and a fish-spear. He sat with his back to the wall of the hut, and Galuak and his father, Rainen, sat on a mat facing him and with their backs to the door, which was closely drawn against the entrance to the hut. The windows had been blocked with grass so that the hut was illumined only by faint shafts of light which penetrated round the edges of the door. Even this dim light could not be seen by Galuak and his father, for skins had been placed over their heads so that they might be in total darkness. Altogether there were, besides Galuak and his father, thirteen persons in the hut, sitting with their backs to the wall. The atmosphere was stifling.

The seance began by the prophet shaking his rattle and singing. Karlual, one of Galuak's maternal uncles, also shook a rattle on one side of the prophet and one of the two friends who had

was a *yang kwoth*, the cow of a spirit, and that no good would come of my possessing it. They were not surprised when one night it tore up its tethering-peg and fell into the Sobat river and was drowned. The *Sudan Intelligence Report* of September-October 1934, No. 69, records the interesting case of a man who was ordered by a Government Chiefs' Court to pay a cow in damages to another Nuer. As at the time he possessed only one cow and this was dedicated to a spirit, the Court permitted him to defer payment while he went to obtain a cow owing to him in a different part of the country. During his absence from home on this errand one of the Government chiefs took his cow. The owner was killed by an elephant on his journey and his kinsmen claimed compensation from the chief because they attributed his death to the removal of the cow devoted to his spirit. The milk of a spirit's cow should only be drunk by members of the family. It belongs to the spirit and is therefore reserved for the people to whom it is attached. I was first made aware of this rule when on a journey I fell sick in a Nuer village and was compelled to spend a few days there. Being unable to eat solid food, I asked a lad of the nearest homestead if I might have a little milk. He said that he was sorry, but the only cow giving milk in his family herd was the cow of his mother's spirit, and he could not let me have its milk without her permission. He later brought some milk and told me that it would be all right for me to drink it as I was sick, but when I could eat again only the children of the home might either milk the cow or drink its milk.

Should a man neglect to dedicate a cow to his spirit when he is in a position to do so, or should he dispose of a beast already devoted to the spirit and not dedicate another to it, sickness is likely to fall on his family or herd. But although Nuer say this, and believe what they say, it is not uncommon for them to use a spirit's cow for bridewealth or some other purpose, hoping that they will soon be able to replace it. They know that they are doing wrong but they think that maybe the spirit, having been informed of their intentions, will understand their difficulty and will excuse their manner of overcoming it, knowing that they mean to keep their promise to give it another cow as soon as they can. But they may not find it easy to procure another cow for some time and the spirit has in the meantime to go without one; or they keep on putting off the replacement because they want to use

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those which had been killed immediately after Nyakewa had been struck by lightning. As the husband of one of Nyakewa's maternal aunts was killed at the same moment as herself while he was on a visit to her village many animals of the village had also to be sacrificed on his behalf in his own village. The flocks of the village were so depleted that there was no suitable beast available for sacrifice in a case of serious sickness which occurred in the village shortly afterwards (p. 35). The number of beasts sacrificed is an indication both of the seriousness of the event which occasioned the ceremony and of the wide circle of persons it affected.

When the sun was high in the heavens on this second day of the ceremony the beer was drunk, though it had not properly fermented. The old men poured some on the sacred stake while uttering a few words. I heard one of the maternal uncles say 'Nyakewa, we have no kinship with God. Thou hast kinship with him now. See, thy mother remains here; do not let the spirits trouble her.' Towards the end of the beer-drinking the people sang hymns to spirits of the air to the accompaniment of hand-clapping.

Later the waste products of the beer were heaped around the base of the stake on top of the tobacco leaves and millet heads and parts of the sacrificed beasts. The dead girl's ox-tassels, her horn spoon, her butter-gourd, and two lumps of tobacco were tied to the stake. These things were said to belong to God, for the girl's soul was now with God. They had become holy and could not be used by man. Finally the cooking stones and pots used in the beer-making were neatly arranged around the heap of offerings. I was told afterwards: 'Nyakewa has altogether departed from us who are men and has become Spirit (*kwoth*). Henceforward we will invoke her name in battle as we brandish our spears.' About a year after this ceremony kinsmen gather again at the shrine to drink beer and to sprinkle (*kiih*) some of it into the air as an offering.

Sometimes a *colwic* spirit seizes a member of its family or lineage, in the same way as a spirit of the air may seize a man, and makes him sick. When he recovers he makes a small mound-shrine (*yiŋ*) in his homestead and this then takes the place of the original shrine at the home of the person killed by lightning. Some of the dead person's ornaments may be inserted into the mound of the new shrine and others hung on the stake erected in it and on the low fence enclosing it.

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spirit of spitting viper (*thatut*) has the name *rol*; and the tree cobra-spirit (*luaidit*) has the name *fajook*. It is clear also in stories of how the ancestor of a lineage was aided by the totem that Nuer are thinking not so much of the animal as such aiding him as of Spirit making itself known to the ancestor in the creature and helping him through it. Nuer further distinguish between totem animal and totemic spirit when the animal harms a man who respects it and he retaliates by harming the animal. It is not the spirit he complains against but the animal, which is here regarded as separate from the spirit and incurring liability simply as a creature. On the other hand, when a totemic spirit seizes one of those to whom it stands in a spiritual relationship and causes him sickness, the sickness is attributed to the spirit and not to the totemic species, a member of which obviously has not seized him. We have also to remember that so far as it can be said that it is thought that a spirit is in a totemic creature it is not thought to be in any particular members of a species but in all of them. It is not a question of *a* spirit being in *a* creature, but the idea of Spirit being associated with a certain creaturely form, a question discussed further in Chapter V.

The words I have translated 'respect' and 'to respect' are *thesk* and its verbal form *thek*. As the words are used in other connexions as well as in reference to totems I leave full discussion of their meaning till a later chapter. Here it is sufficient to say that a Nuer shows respect for his totem by refraining from hurting it in any way and above all from eating it, if it is edible; by paying it some courtesy of recognition if he meets it; by formal expression of regret, such as throwing grass on its body, should he find it dead; and by an expression of disapproval, for no more than that seems to be required of him, should someone injure it in his presence. The respect is reciprocal. As we have seen, lions should refrain from killing the cattle of those who respect them, crocodiles should not injure those who respect them, and ostriches should not eat the millet of those who respect them. It will be noted that Nuer respect the totem and not the totemic spirit. I do not think that the word *thek* can properly be used of Spirit, except so far as it is identified with a totemic or other appearance, for it implies that the object of respect is something knowable to the senses and can therefore be avoided or treated with special concern.

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species of creatures his first act would be to dedicate a beast of his herd to Spirit in the form and of the name of that species. Thus Spirit through its new attachment to whatever the natural species may be becomes in relation to that man and his family a new spirit of the below with its own distinctive material form different from the material forms of other spirits, and with a name derived from the natural species distinguishing it from other spirits with names derived from other species.

There are other ways in which Nuer say that a man may acquire a totemistic relationship to a natural species, though they also say that it is only rarely that the relationship is maintained by his descendants. They have told me that a man may become seized or possessed by a spirit associated with some creature, the seizure or possession being known by sickness and its diagnosis by one or other form of divination, and that he may afterwards respect it. In practice this is only likely to happen when the particular spirit has been the spirit of some forebear of the sick man. He and his relatives may cast their minds back to any such past affiliations when reflecting on what might be the cause of the sickness. People acquire totemistic obligations through affinal and maternal links. A man respects his wife's totems, at any rate to the extent of not eating or otherwise harming them shortly before having congress with her and during her pregnancies; and a woman respects her husband's totems. Nuer generally respect their mother's totems, but not always. A man said to me, in speaking of a totem of his mother's lineage, 'it is not shared by us, she was married into another lineage' (the speaker's own lineage). Nuer have assured me that a wife's totems will not persist in her husband's line of descent. Her sons' sons may respect them, but this is unlikely unless the spirits of the totems cause them sickness, and then they will generally be forgotten. Consequently, totems, other than those which belong to lineages and go with agnatic descent, enter into families for a generation or two and then go out of them again. But they may return. I once had an interesting discussion with some Nuer about a baby with deformed legs. My informants, who were not related to the child, held that the deformation must have resulted from one of his parents, who should have respected the monitor lizard, having killed or eaten this reptile. They made this deduction from the resemblance they saw between the legs of the child and those of the lizard. When I pro-

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tested that surely a man would not kill or eat a creature he respects, I was told that 'it may be that a man is a fool and kills his *kwoth* deliberately'. Here we are to understand by *kwoth* a totem deriving from some maternal affiliation and not the totem of the man's own lineage. I was also told that it sometimes happens that a man does not know all the classes of objects he ought to respect or is uncertain about them. 'His father was forgetful and did not trouble to dedicate a cow to it (the spirit) or think of it at all, though he did not eat it (the totem). Then the son is forgetful too and one day they forget all about it and have no recollection of it at all.' Nuer also told me that it may happen that a boy is brought up among his mother's people and is not told by them about totems which have come into his father's family from Dinka women. In other words and in our way of speaking, people have totemistic relationships to the totems of persons with whom they have affinal and maternal links and these totemistic relationships are forgotten in course of time by their descendants, who may then be reminded of them by sickness. I do not think it could ever happen that a man could be ignorant of the totem of his own lineage, for I have found that children of under six years of age know it; or that a man would deliberately harm it.

Nevertheless, though a spirit associated with a natural species is most likely to seize persons who have some past connexion with it, any striking event, and particularly any sickness or other unfortunate event, might, Nuer think, bring about a totemistic relationship which could persist till it had hardened into a totemic one. The event is evidence of the action of Spirit and the conception of Spirit may become particularized by reference to the specific cause of misfortune in relation to the person or persons who have suffered it. Thus, as we have noted, a man may suffer from a disease and, after recovering from it, respect it. The disease was taken to be a manifestation of Spirit and the man who suffered it afterwards has not only the general relationship everyone has to God but also a particular relationship to God in his refraction as a spirit of the disease.

A totemistic, and potentially totemic, relationship may come about with regard to some class of objects through a man or a member of his family suffering any kind of misfortune. A man was killed by a fishing-spear and his children now respect fishing-spears. Another man was killed by the bite of a snake and his

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say *'e kwoth'*, 'it is Spirit', meaning that its doing so is a spiritual signal presaging disaster. A lion is not thought of as being in itself Spirit; it is a beast. But it may, on account of some event which brings it into a peculiar relation to man, such as being born, as Nuer think sometimes happens, as twin to a human child, be regarded as a revelation of Spirit for a particular family and lineage. Likewise, diseases, or rather their symptoms, are not thought of as being in themselves Spirit, but their appearance in individuals may be regarded as manifestations of Spirit for those individuals. Spirit acts, and thereby reveals itself, through these creatures. This distinction between the nature of a thing and what it may signify in certain situations or for certain persons is very evident in totemic relationships. A crocodile is Spirit for certain persons, but it is not thought to be in its nature Spirit, for others kill and eat it. It is because Nuer separate, and quite explicitly when questioned about the matter, spiritual conceptions from such material things as may nevertheless be said 'to be' the conceptions, that they are able to maintain the unity and autonomy of Spirit in spite of a great diversity of accidents and are able to speak of Spirit without reference to any of its material manifestations.

So far I have been mostly speaking of the conception of God and of those of his refractions which belong to the category of the sky or of the above. With two possible exceptions,[1] we cannot say that the things said 'to be' these spirits are material symbols or representations of them; at any rate not in the same sense as we can speak of things being symbols of those lesser refractions of Spirit Nuer call spirits of the earth or of the below, in which God stands in a special relationship to lineages and individuals—such diverse things as beasts, birds, reptiles, trees, phosphorescent objects, and pieces of wood. These lesser refractions of Spirit, regarded as distinct spirits in relation to each other, cannot, unlike the spirits of the air, easily be thought of except in relation to the things by reference to which they derive their individuality, and which are said 'to be' them.

When, therefore, Nuer say that the pied crow is the spirit *buk* or that a snake is Spirit, the word 'is' has a different sense from what it has in the statement that rain is Spirit. The difference does not

[1] The spear *wic* may be said to stand for the spirit *wic* (pp. 31 and 141), and the pied crow may be said to stand for the spirit *buk* which is the most commonly conceived of among the greater spirits (pp. 32–33 and 81).

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789 593 A mother may curse her son for neglect, especially when she is old and must rely on others for support, or for divulging her hiding-place to her husband if he is angry with her and seeks for her to chastise her. A mother's curse may have the same effects as a father's curse; but it is thought that, in addition, it has the particular effect of preventing the son from begetting male children. A mother's curse may thus injure the lineage, and in this respect her curse is more like that of the mother's brother than that of the father. I have also been told that a mother may, because she loves a son who has wandered to a distant country, curse him mildly so that he may suffer some minor sickness which will put him in memory of his home and cause him to return to it.

789 604 The curse of a mother's brother—at any rate that of a mother's uterine brother—is also greatly feared by Nuer, for he, unlike the father, may curse a man 'to cattle', so that he loses his entire herd. Nuer seem to regard it as the worst of all curses and they recognize it as a strong sanction behind the demands of their mothers' brothers, where these are just. A sister's son who fails to carry out [755] certain duties or who fails to observe certain interdictions concerning his mother's brother may develop a disease called *keth nuor* (disease of the *nuor*, mother's brother), which may be fatal. Nuer describe it as '*cere ke biir*', 'like to a curse'. People say that [605] the curses of father, mother, and mother's brother are the worst, though that of a paternal grandmother is also said to be bad, and [593] it is said that the curse of an eldest child is feared by his parents, especially his mother, and by his maternal uncle; in certain circumstances a sister's son, especially the eldest son of the sister, may curse his maternal uncle's herd. The only other kinsfolk of whom I have been specifically told that they may curse a man, in the sense that one may speak of a curse of the kinship category in which they stand, are the father's sister and the mother's sister, and Nuer say that these are very small curses and they do not therefore give them much thought; but a person standing in any social relationship to another may curse him if he has been wronged by him. However, the more distant the relationship the less effective the curse, because the less the obligation and therefore the less the wrong.

789 593 A run of misfortunes may be attributed to the curse of one of these relatives. I tell one story in illustration. Luak, a man of the Leek tribe, refused to stay at home and help his father Thicjok to

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775 As Nuer speak about *cien* it has, therefore, the sense of an 626 injustice crying out for vengeance. The essence of the concept is the notion of a wrong unrighted, of a grievance which demands, and rightly demands, redress. Even a living man who has no other way of getting justice may say to the man who has wronged him *'ba ji cien'*, 'I will haunt you', meaning that though he cannot get justice now he will get it after he is dead. Nuer say that he may express this threat not in words but by looks. As in the case of the *biit*, so with the *cien*, it is God who makes the ghostly vengeance to work. Nuer say that the wronged ghost exacts vengeance by making his cause known to God, who sooner or later punishes the wrongdoer.

753 The moral action of *biit* and *cien*, which have a similarity to certain ideas of sin discussed in the next chapter, is in this respect very different for Nuer from the exercise of psychical and physical powers which have no moral foundation and are therefore not thought to involve divine judgement and intervention and are only thought of in connexion with Spirit, if at all, so far as all that happens in the world can ultimately be said to happen because God allows it and can be appealed to to change the course of [193] events. I refer to the evil eye (*peth*); ghouls (*roth*); the danger of [177] pregnant women (*ther*) and to a lesser extent of their husbands, an idea some of the eastern Nuer have taken over from the Anuak; [194] the danger of women who commence menstruation in the dry season month of *pet* (*koc mai*); the danger of a child after two or three of its elder brothers and sisters have died at, or shortly after, [192] birth (*jul*); monorchids (*tor*), a child conceived while its mother is still suckling (*mok*); and menstruation, which is dangerous for the cattle—no woman may drink their milk at this time. If Nuer are in danger from any of these influences they may pray and sacrifice to God, but if they do so their prayers and sacrifices are mixed up with all sorts of other and different sets of ideas and they deal with the situation mainly by magical rites which would be both inappropriate and ineffective where Spirit is concerned. They therefore cannot properly be included under the rubric of religion and so lie outside the scope of this book. They are mentioned only in order that their relative unimportance may be emphasized. That in itself is of significance. Perspective would be lost were it not understood.

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196 784 Nuer speak of these conventions with regard to nakedness and eating as *theak ma tot*, minor respect. That they do not think of them as faults of the same order as breaches of the other rules of respect—*theak ma dit*, major respect—is also shown by the fact that though all the rules are alike referred to as *thek* they do not speak of a breach of either the nakedness or the food convention as *nueer*,[1] the word, the verbal form of which is *nuer*, which they use when speaking of breaches of some of the other rules and the consequences of them. We have earlier met the word in reference to eating human flesh (p. 19) and to drinking from a pool contaminated by a corpse (p. 130). A breach of the more serious rules of *thek* is likely to cause death to the breakers or their children or cattle, especially if the breach was wilful. I was told that *nueer* is [753] a sickness of the whole body which generally begins with violent vomiting, but probably any serious sickness following the breach of a *thek* taboo would be described as *nueer*. Sometimes the offender's life can be saved by timely action, and his recovery is thought to be likely if his offence was unintentional. Sacrifice is made to God and in certain circumstances an infusion of cleansing medicines may also be drunk.

196 784 577 262 The attitude Nuer call *thek* is thus different from mere avoidance of doing things considered to be unbecoming. Failure to conform to *thek* prohibitions involves the culprit in something more than *puc*, shame, and its counterpart *cany*, a word which has the general sense of 'to despise'. Any conspicuous breach of morality or decorum is shameful in Nuer eyes, as when a man steals or is rude to his father. It is shameful—to give another example—for a man, especially if he is unmarried and is courting girls, to eat birds or eggs. Only a *bar*, a poor man without cattle, would eat them. I was frequently taunted by Nuer on this score: 'are you not a man that you eat such little things?' Nuer also regard the eating of most wild fruits as contemptible and they think it both disgusting and shameful to eat carnivora, monkeys, zebras, most reptiles, and all insects. The breach of a *thek* rule may be shameful and despicable, but when it is spoken of as *nueer* it is also sinful.

196 784 783 There are, as will be seen, prohibitions with religious sanctions

[1] It should perhaps be made clear that the word *nueer* has nothing to do with 'Nuer', the name of the people. 'Nuer' is not the name by which the people refer to themselves but is what foreigners call them.

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through adoption, and close affinity. It is also incestuous for a man 835
to have carnal relations with the daughter of an age-mate and for
two closely related persons of the same sex to have congress with
a person of the opposite sex, even though that person is unrelated
to them. A further reason is that Nuer regard incest as a venial
offence if the partners are distantly related, and young men cer-
tainly often take the slight risk involved. It is easier to understand
why incest outside the family and nearest kin is not infrequent if
we consider it also in a general setting of sex relations. Nuer do 836
not object to girls having love affairs before marriage so long as
they are reasonably discreet in them and give their favours to
youths with cattle, who may at least be supposed to have what
we call honourable intentions; and little opprobrium attaches to
adultery, of which they speak light-heartedly and without disgust
or shame.

Nevertheless, adultery (*dhom*), besides being a wrong done to 837
the husband by infringement of his rights, is a further wrong to 783
him in that he is polluted. A husband who discovers his wife *in
flagrante delicto* may obtain summary justice by spear or club.
Otherwise he demands compensation in cattle, and if the two men
are members of the same local community he is likely to receive
it. In addition to the cattle paid in compensation, the adulterer
hands over to the husband an ox called *yang kula*, the ox of the
(husband's) sleeping-hide. This is paid to protect the husband
from the consequences of the adultery, known as *kor*, a concept
of which one also hears much in Nuerland. *Kor* is a condition
brought about by a man having congress with his wife after she [753]
has been unfaithful to him. All three persons are polluted, but if
sickness results it falls on the husband, and it is most likely to fall
on him if the adultery took place in his home. This sickness is also
called *kor*, though it may be referred to as well as *juei kula*, sick-
ness of the hide, or, on account of its symptoms, *juei letka*, sickness
of the loins. I was told that it may prove fatal, though Miss Soule
says that it is myalgia of the lumbar region. Nuer told me that 837
they learnt about *kor*, as they learnt about so many of the ideas 783
discussed in this book, from the Dinka and that it was also from
that people that they took over a preventive and curative treat- 177
ment of it, *wal kore, kor* medicine, the tip of a buffalo's horn [757]
which is burnt, and its smoke inhaled. Their statement that the
concept is a Dinka one is supported, among other evidences, by

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not drink their milk and that should he even tread on their dung he might cause grave injury either to himself or to his cattle. Likewise, a man will not accept as bridewealth for his daughter cattle paid to her husband in compensation for adultery she has committed. This is a shocking idea to Nuer, who say that it is like incest. 837 783

The pollution may spread (*dop*) beyond those directly concerned in it. The adulterer, the husband, and the wife are dangerous to anyone they come into contact with who has an open sore, for the *kor* may enter him through it. One day at a wedding a youth was trying to reconcile his desire to watch the dancing with the need to hide an open wound from the eyes of those who might cause it to fester, by watching the dance from the shelter of maize plants. I heard his mother shout to him in reprimand 'there you stand in the maize where people can see you. Is *ther* (p. 176) a good thing, and is *kor* a good thing, that you thus expose yourself?' It is largely from fear lest an adulterer or adulteress or cuckold might see them that lads are so closely secluded while they still have open wounds on their foreheads after initiation. Adultery may also cause a wife who has been partner to it to suffer in childbirth, and if she finds the pains of labour grievous she will make known to the midwife any adulterous acts she may have committed. The sin and its consequences become less by being confessed. 837 783 753

Another dangerous influence is that brought about by a man having congress with his wife while she is nursing a child. Responsibility rests with the husband, 'for this is an affair of men, and it is not a woman's business to deny her husband access'. As has been noted, this is an offence that comes within the category of *nueer*, but the specific name for it is *thieng*. This word denotes the act itself, the consequences which follow from it, and the rite performed to ward off the consequences. Since children are not weaned till they are about three years old it might be thought that husbands must often give way to temptation, but one seldom hears of a wife becoming pregnant before her child at the breast is weaned, and Nuer themselves say that it is uncommon. I cannot say whether a husband who commits the offence would generally perform the prescribed rites unless the pregnancy of his wife made it common knowledge. In the only cases I have come across action was taken when it became evident that a nursing mother was pregnant. I was told that it was then taken to ward off the 783 834

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783 they tend to take the view that it is scarcely for them to censure a man whose desires have got the better of him. When there is adultery, the husband may be indignant and demand compensation for the injury done to him, but Nuer do not become indignant at the idea of adultery. The essential point is that such faults as we are considering are, wholly or in part, conceived of as offences against God, and Nuer think that it is he who punishes them. It is God's *cuong*, right, rather than, or as well as, man's, that has been violated. The man who commits them, therefore, places himself, and possibly others too, in danger by having done something which brings spirit into action in the affairs of men.

783 176 This danger is a condition which to some extent appears to be regarded as physical, the threatening misfortune, usually sickness, which results and is the outward manifestation of the sin being already in the man before it manifests itself. He is contaminated by his act. This is why medicines, aspersions, fumigations, and other modes of expulsion and cleansing are used in addition to the atoning act of sacrifice. This is more than mimicry. The pollution is substantival. That the sin is felt to be attached to the man is further expressed by two words of great significance, *dop* and *woc*. *Dop* means to catch alight, the spreading of a flame or fire. It is also used to describe a man catching a disease, yaws for example, from another and the spreading of an epidemic or murrain, such as smallpox or rinderpest (Nuer are aware that such diseases are spread by contact); and it can likewise refer to anything spreading, as a fight developing out of a quarrel and people other than the principals becoming involved in it. The general idea is that of a person catching something from another, an infection, whether it be a disease, a quarrel, or a bad habit. In our present context the word means that the uncleanness which results from sins may pass to others closely related to those who are directly concerned in them. They also are in danger. *Woc* is used in a number of contexts in which the sense is getting rid of something, especially by wiping it out. It is the ritual ones which more particularly concern us. The first cut across the forehead at initiation is called the *woc dhol*, the wiping out of boyhood. The final rites of marriage are said to wipe out maidenhood. As we have noted, the mortuary ceremony is called *col woc*, the wiping out of death and mourning with their association of debt. The word is also used in reference to sacrifices made on account of a transgression. Sacrifice is

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said to *woc*, wipe out, *nuaer*, *ruul*, *kor*, and *thiang*, and indeed any *dueer*, fault. The transgressor is healed by the blotting out of his transgression. God turns away, as the Nuer put it. He does not regard it any more, so it ceases to be. When used in reference to sacrifices made on account of sins the word has thus the sense of expiation, and it is interesting that the same word which Nuer use for wiping out a transgression means in Dinka 'to err', 'to sin', and 'offence'.[1] We have in the words *dop* and *woc* two ideas which throw much light on the way Nuer regard sins and sacrifices made in consequence of them. Sin, as has been noted, is something which destroys and which tracks down. Two other characteristics of it are now revealed. It can spread and it can be wiped out by sacrifice. But though sin is regarded as bringing about a condition of the person which is contagious, the uncleanness is not simply a physical impurity which can be washed or purged away. It is also a spiritual state which can only be changed by sacrifice; and not even sacrifice is sufficient by itself to change it, only sacrifice which carries with it the will and desire of the sinner. What gives emphasis to the physical quality of the condition is the fact that the consequences of sin, which in a sense form part of it, are physical. This brings us to a very important matter, the identification of disease with sin.

Nuer may speak, as we have seen, of the consequences of a sin by the same word (in which the interdiction is also implied) as they use when they speak of the sin itself. *Ruul* is incest, and it is also syphilis and yaws. *Nuaer* is a breach of certain interdictions, and it is also the violent sickness which follows the breach. *Thiang* is a breach of the weaning interdiction, and it is also the dysentery the breach causes. Different diseases have different names, it is true, but if the sin which brought the sickness about is known it is spoken of by the name of the sin. The particular form of the sickness, the particular consequences which have resulted from the sin, are of secondary interest. Had the man suffered from a different ailment it would have been from the same cause. Therefore one may say that where there is a state of sin such sickness as it appears in is a symptom of the sin, or even in a sense is the sin. Even where there has been no breach of a specific interdiction, and there is consequently not the same verbal identification, any sickness tends to be regarded as the operation of Spirit on account

[1] J. C. Minnerzhagen, *Die Dinka Sprache*, 1866, p. 303; Trudinger, op. cit., p. 198.

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783 of some fault on the part of the sick person or of someone closely
●753 related to him, and it may simply be said to be *kwoth*, meaning that it is the action of Spirit. A sickness may always be a sign of some fault. No attempt may be made to discover whether there has been a fault or not or what the fault, if any, was, but Nuer think that a man would not be sick if there had been no error, though the thought is not always expressed.

Since sickness is the action of Spirit therapeutic treatment is sacramental. The sickness is only a symptom of the spiritual condition of the person, which is the underlying cause of the crisis; and it can only be cured by expiation—sacrifice—for the sin which has brought it about. This, then, is a further characteristic of sin. It causes physical misfortune, usually sickness, which is identified with it, so that the healing of the sickness is felt to be also the wiping out of the sin. When Nuer say that sacrifice wipes out the *giak*, the badness or evil, they do not just mean that the sickness will depart but also that what may have caused it will be no more. When a serious sin has been committed sacrifice is made before there are any signs of sickness.

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577 ventions. Certain violations of specific interdictions are held to be divinely punished and these have special names, *nueer*, *rual*, and so forth. But they are covered by the general term *dueri*, faults. That term covers also breaches of any social convention. There is, therefore, no convenient terminological distinction in Nuer which we can follow in translation to mark off faults of the kind we have been considering and have called sins from faults of some other kind. Moreover, God is regarded as the guardian of the social order and his intervention as a possible sanction for any rule of conduct. We cannot, therefore, make an absolute distinction between what we have called sins and other faults. We can only say that the religious sanction is more severe, and more definite, and tends also to be more exclusive, in the case of the faults we have been discussing than in cases of other faults.

A *duer*, fault, of any kind may, as we have earlier noted, bring about divine punishment. It may do so through the action of a curse or of ghostly vengeance, and as in such cases God is thought to be the arbiter the fault involves to some extent the idea of divine intervention and consequently the need for sacrifice; and a misfortune may be attributed to a curse of the living or to anger of the

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ghosts and hence to injuries done to them. It may do so through fetishes, though, as we have noted, there is some ambiguity and confusion about their morality. Particular calamities are not otherwise attributed to specific breaches of custom, and I have never seen or heard of sacrifices performed on account of such breaches. Serious sickness, the commonest occasion of sacrifice, in all cases I have examined, was attributed, when attributed to anything, to an infraction of one of the interdictions we have been discussing, to seizure or possession by a spirit, generally seizure on account of neglect of obligations to it, to ghostly vengeance, or to a fetish, and not simply to failure to observe the social code. But we have to bear in mind that when there is sickness not attributed to some specific cause sacrifice is, nevertheless, performed to cover any or all unknown causes and that among such causes may be moral faults which have caught up with the sick man in his sickness, and this is so because God has taken notice of them.

Consequently, such moral faults as meanness, disloyalty, dishonesty, slander, lack of deference to seniors, and so forth, cannot be entirely dissociated from sin, for God may punish them even if those who have suffered from them take no action of their own account. Nuer seem to regard moral faults as accumulating and creating a condition of the person predisposing him to disaster, which may then fall upon him on account of some act or omission which might not otherwise and by itself have brought it about. This is further suggested by the custom of confession at certain sacrifices, when it is necessary to reveal all resentments and grievances a man may have in his heart towards others. This may be rather a peculiar kind of confession, that of other people's shortcomings, but the point is that the faults together with the feelings they have engendered are placed on the victim and flow away into the earth with its blood.

But though the notion of *kwoth* is as ubiquitous as the air to which it is likened and may be evoked in relation to any question of right and wrong there are differences between its association with such sins as incest or eating with persons with whom one is at feud and its association with faults which have a moral or legal, rather than a religious character, such as lack of deference to an elder or refusal to pay a debt. When an action of the first kind, which is definitely and wholly of a sinful character, has been committed it is likely, if it is thought to be a serious transgression, to